

Issues - womans health

Women's Health

A Leader on Women's Health Issues

Rep. Louise Slaughter is proud to serve as Vice-Chair of the Women's Caucus and Co-Chair of its Health Care Task Force, a prominent voice for women's health in Congress. As an outspoken supporter of increased efforts in women's health research and services, she has worked throughout her entire career in Congress to educate her colleagues, women, and the public at large about the importance of these issues and to craft legislative initiatives to improve women's health.

Rep. Slaughter's activities on women's health have ranged from breast cancer research to genetic nondiscrimination to advocacy and education. As a member of the House Budget Committee in the early 1990s, she was responsible for securing passage of the first \$500 million dedicated to breast cancer research, as well as substantial increases in following years. She sponsored the first legislation dedicated to increasing education and research on diethylstilbestrol, or DES, an anti-miscarriage drug prescribed until 1971 that has had serious health consequences for many of the children exposed in utero. Rep. Slaughter's other projects have addressed issues including female genital mutilation, women's environmental health, colorectal cancer, and eating disorders.

As a recognized leader on women's health issues, Rep. Slaughter has addressed such events and organizations as the National Institutes of Health's "Beyond Hunt Valley" conference to map the next five years of women's health research; the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; the American Jewish Conference; Business and Professional Women; Healthy Women 2000's program, "Winning the War Against Cancer in Women;" the Huntington's Disease Society of America; the National Multiple Sclerosis Society; the American Psychological Association; Women in Government Relations; and the American Public Health Association. She serves as an unpaid advisory member on numerous women's health-related boards and committees, including Advisory Committees for the Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy Women 2000 initiative and the Einstein Institute for Science, Health and the Courts.

She has received a number of awards for her work on women's health, including the Society for Women's Health

Research achievement award for "dedication to women's health," the American Public Health Association Distinguished Public Health Legislator Award, the International Health Awareness Network honor for "lifelong commitment to women's equality," and the National Breast Cancer Coalition award for "recognition of leadership in the fight against breast cancer." In addition, Rep. Slaughter has appeared on television programs including "To the Contrary," "Equal Time," and "Technopolitics" to discuss women's health issues.

Following are highlights of Rep. Slaughter's activities during the 106th Congress (1999-2000), as well as her previous efforts.

Women's Health Initiatives in the 107th Congress

Promoting research on women's health and the environment. Based on emerging research on the potential impact of environmental estrogens and other factors on women's health, Rep. Slaughter has authored H.R. 183, the Women's Health Environmental Research Centers Act. This legislation would establish six centers of excellence on women's environmental health research. In 1995, she sponsored legislation requiring a review of all Federal programs that assess or mitigate the risks to women's health from environmental exposures, and for a study of the research needs of the Federal Government relating to such risks. Similar language was included in pesticides reform legislation that passed Congress and became law in September 1996.

Raising the profile of women's health research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the nation's premier biomedical research agency. Upon the departure of NIH Director Harold Varmus, Rep. Slaughter sponsored a letter co-signed by 19 Women's Caucus members urging the President to ensure that the next NIH director has a firm and demonstrable commitment to women's health. She led the Women's Caucus in pressing for more funding for the NIH Office of Research on Women's Health by testifying on this issue and sponsoring a letter to House appropriators co-signed by 21 Women's Caucus members.

Prohibiting genetic discrimination in health insurance and employment. Rep. Slaughter is the acknowledged leader in Congress on this issue, having sponsored two high-profile bills to protect Americans against genetic discrimination. H.R. 602, the Genetic Nondiscrimination in Health Insurance and Employment Act, would ban discrimination by health insurers or employers on the basis of an individual's genes. H.R. 602 has garnered support from a bipartisan majority of Congress and endorsements from over 100 health-related organizations. It has been the subject of several hearings.

Fighting colorectal cancer, the Number Two cancer killer of Americans. Because this cancer receives too little attention, Rep. Slaughter has addressed the need for prevention, education, and awareness. She is currently sponsoring legislation requiring insurance companies to cover screening tests for colorectal cancer, in part because too many women remain unaware that colorectal cancer strikes women and men with equal frequency. Previous to this bill, she authored a resolution urging the Secretary of Health and Human Services to launch a new public awareness campaign on colorectal cancer. This language was included in the 1998 omnibus appropriations package and the campaign was launched in March 1999. In 1997, she requested a Department of Health and Human Services report on colorectal cancer, the number three cancer killer of American men and women, in order to lead public education and awareness efforts.

Women's Health Initiatives in previous Congresses

Promoting DES Research and Education. Rep. Slaughter sponsored the successfully-enacted DES Education and Research Amendments of 1993, providing for public health education, health professional training, and additional research on the long-term health effects of exposure to DES, a drug administered to women to prevent miscarriage but discovered to have devastating health consequences for many of the mothers and their children exposed in utero. She also authored follow-up legislation to extend and expand these programs, the DES Education and Research Amendments of 1997, which was passed and signed into law in October 1998.

Working to reduce the incidence of eating disorders. Rep. Slaughter secured passage of the Eating Disorders Information and Education Act, which was included in the 1998 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Departments funding legislation. Eating disorders information is now included in prominent federal health education campaigns such as healthfinder.gov, the National Women's Health Information Center, and GirlPower! Rep. Slaughter followed up by urging the Federal Trade Commission to establish consistent regulations for advertising in the commercial weight loss industry in order to reduce deceptive claims.

Fighting to prevent female genital mutilation. Rep. Slaughter requested a report from the Department of Health and Human Services on the continuing prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM) in the United States in an attempt to find the best ways to discourage this practice. She has also been responsible for the passage of legislative language directing the Department of Health and Human Services to continue and intensify its efforts to educate immigrant communities in the U.S. about the health dangers posed by this practice.